

John Henry on Christmas Presents

By GEORGE V. HOBART

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SAY! Did you ever take what little was left and start out to buy friend wife a Christmas token?

A quaint pastime, is it not?

Well, to make a long story lose its cunning, I clinked a few iron men together recently and started out to find something new and nifty in the gift line for Peaches.

I was breezing for a department store when I ran across Hep Hardy, limping in the direction of a taxicab stand.

"Up late, aren't you, Hep?" I inquired, glancing at the Waterbury.

"I sure am running behind my schedule this morning, John, Hep wheezed. "Accident."

"What's the matter? Fuse blow out and leave you and your favorite bartender in darkness?" I ventured.

"Nix," he answered; "I interpolated a new step in the Tango about five this a. m. and my partner, an impulsive little thing from Spokane, didn't get my signal, with the result that she stepped on me and lost one of her French heels somewhere between my ankle and my instep. I had to wait till a Doctor Shop was open so he could probe for it. The medicine peddler found it all right and my left foot is a bit wobbly, but I'll be in the arena tonight when the bell clangs, clamoring for my favorite rag. You can bet on that, John, old pal."

"The dance bug has you for fair, hasn't it, Hep?" I laughed.

"Not at all," Hep came back; "but like a lot of other ginks who have been going through life with stoop shoulders and plantation feet I've suddenly discovered how to be graceful and I have to stay up all night to see if other people notice it. Where are you going?"

"I'm going down to see one of those stores and make a fool out of fifty dollars—little Christmas present for Peaches," I answered.

"Fifty dollars!" Hep sneered. "Say, John, if I had a wife, and we were speaking to each other, fifty dollars wouldn't buy the ribbon around the bundle. Fifty dollars! You make a noise like a pike."

"Sure!" I snapped back. "If you had a wife you'd take her down to your favorite jewelry store and let the clerks throw diamonds at her till they fell exhausted. But I'm just a regular

one of those department store mobs and have a crowd of perfect ladies use you for a doormat?

I got mine!

They certainly taught me the Huer-ta glide, all right!

At the door a nice young man with a pink necktie and a quick forehead bowed to me.

"What do you wish?" he asked.

"Well," I said, "I'm down here to get a Christmas present for friend wife. I would like something which would afford her great pleasure when I give it to her and which I could use afterward as a penwiper or a fishing rod."

"Second floor—to the right—take the elevator," said the man.

Did you ever try to take an elevator in a department store and find that 3,943 other American citizens and citizenettes were also trying to take the same elevator?

How sweet it is to mingle in the arms of utter strangers and to feel the pressure of a foot we never hope to meet again!

I was standing by one of the counters on the second floor when a shrill voice crept up over a few bales of dry

goods and said, "Are you a buyer or a handier?"

"I am looking for a Christmas present for friend wife," I answered. "I want to get something that will look swell on the parlor table and may be used later on as a tobacco jar or a trouser stretcher!"

"Fourth floor—to the left—take the elevator!" said the shrill voice, but shriller.

With bowed head I walked away.

I began to feel sorry for friend wife. Nobody seemed to be very much interested whether she got a Christmas present or not.

On the fourth floor I stopped at a counter where a lot of eager dames were pawing over some chinchilla ribbon and chiffon overskirts.

It reminded me of the way an emotional hen digs up a grub in the garden.

I enjoyed the excitement of the game for about ten minutes and then I said to the clerk behind the counter who was refereeing the match, "Can you tell me where I can buy a sterling silver Christmas present for friend wife which I could use afterward as a night key or a bath sponge?"

"Fifth floor—to the rear—take the elevator!" said the clerk.

On the fifth floor I went over to a table where a young lady was selling "The Life and Libraries of Andrew Carnegie" at four dollars a month and fifty cents a week, and in three years it is yours if you don't lose the receipts.

She gave me a glad smile and I felt a thrill of encouragement.

"Excuse me," I said, "but I am looking for a Christmas present for friend wife which will make all the neighbors jealous, and which I can use afterward as an ash receiver or a pocket flask."

The young lady cut out the giggles and pointed to the northwest.

I went over there.

To my surprise I found another counter.

A pale young woman was behind it. I was just about to ask her the fatal question when a young man wearing a ragtime expression on his face rushed up and said to the pale young lady behind the counter: "I am looking for a suitable present for a young lady friend of mine with golden brown hair. Could you please suggest something?"

The pale young woman showed her teeth and answered him in a low, rumbling voice, and the man went away.

Then came an old lady who said: "I bought some organdie dress goods for a shirt waist last Tuesday, and I would like to exchange them for a music box for my daughter's little boy, Freddie, if you please!"

The pale young woman again showed her teeth and the old lady ducked for cover.

After about fifty people had rushed up to the pale young woman and then rushed away again, I went over and spoke to her.

"I am looking," I said, "for a Christmas present for friend wife. I want



The Pale Young Woman Fainted.

to get something that will give her a great amount of pleasure and which I can use later on as a pipe cleaner or a pair of suspenders!"

The pale young woman fainted, so I moved over.

At another counter another young lady said to me: "Have you been waiting?"

"No," I replied; "I have been stepped on, sat on and walked on, but I have not yet been waited on."

"What do you wish?" inquired the young woman.

"I am looking for a Christmas present for friend wife," he said. "I want to buy her something that will bring great joy to her heart, and which I might use afterward as a pair of slippers or a shaving mug."

The young lady caught me with her dreamy eyes and held me up against the wall.

"You," she screamed, "you complete a total of 25,493 people who have been in this department store today without knowing what they are doing here, and I refuse to be a human encyclopedia for the sake of eight dollars a week. Go on, now; throw yourself into second speed and climb the hill!"

I began to apologize, but she reached down under the counter and pulled out a club.

"This," she said, with a wild look in her side glances, "this is happy Yuletide, but, nevertheless, the next guy that leaves his brains at home and tries to make me tell him what is a good Christmas present for his wife will get a bitter wallop across the forehead!"

The girl was right, so I went home without a present.

I suppose I'll have to take Hep's tip and get those emeralds after all.

But first I'll go down to the delicatessen store and see if there's anything there.

THE MYSTERY OF CHRISTMAS

One Day of the Year That All Other Days Are Learning to Envy and Imitate.

It seems to me that always, as the 24th of December commenced to shorten, the white, fleecy snow began to fall, says a writer in the Craftsman. When the street lamps flickered up like candles on an altar, they gazed on a world that was white. The strife of the city was muffled. Carts went by, but you had to peer out through the blinds to know that they were passing—they made no sound. An atmosphere of gentleness had descended. Everyone in the house went about with stealth, as though planning some secret kindness.

And then the night and the trying to keep awake till Santa Claus should come. And the waking up, with the frost weaving patterns on the panes. Somewhere far away a harp was being played, and a cornet was challenging the silence. The tune they played was an accompaniment to the most beautiful legend in the world. At first, dreamily, you tried to remember why for once the darkness was not frightening, and then, "Ah, it's Christmas!" As you turned, your feet made the paper crack, and at the end of the bed you were too content and happy even to look at your presents. Why was it that next day everybody and everything was different? The air was full of bells singing riotously. Every one, for this one day, ceased to think of his own happiness and found happiness in bringing cheerfulness to others. The stern gulf which is fixed between children and grown-ups had vanished—there weren't any grown-ups. Somewhere in your childish heart you wondered why every day couldn't be made a day of kindness.

And that wonder of a child's heart is the Christmas message. Once a year, by a divine conspiracy, all the ships of our hopes and fears turn back from their voyages to the harbor of tenderness. They are borne back on the crest of a white tide of mysticism that sweeps round the world. A truce of God is declared to all fightings, and men and women walk as children through a world that is kind. They commence to give and cease to annex; they act in the belief that God is in his heaven. The spirit is one tremendous white day of unselfishness—a day which gradually some other days in the year are learning to envy and imitate.

Why We Burn Candles.

The custom of burning candles on the Christmas tree comes from two sources. The Romans burned candles at the feast of Saturn as a sign of good cheer, while the Jews burned candles during the feast of the Dedication, which happened to fall about the same time as that of Saturn in the Roman calendar. It is quite possible that for this reason there would have been many candles burning all over Palestine about the time of the birth of Christ, and from this comes the term "Feast of Lights," which is the name used in the Greek church for Christmas day.

A Christmas Hint.

To those who may have become tired of the old-fashioned games usual at Christmas the following may be found suitable:

Hunt up a lot of poor people that have not got any Christmas dinner and go and give them one.

N. B.—This game may be played by any number of persons.

Welcome to Christmas!

Christmas, crown o' the year! Golden clasp to its round of light and shadow. Fruity the bells of it shall ring out, "Plague I banish, peace I bring!" Welcome it royally. Spread out for soul and sense a feast of good things.—Martha McWilliams.

Santa Mike— A Christmas Convict Story

By T. C. BRIDGES



AS THE December night closed across the desolate moor, the snow ceased falling, the clouds broke, and a brilliant moon shed its silver light across the wide stretches of rolling whiteness. With the change, it began to freeze fiercely, coating the sodden drifts with a crisp film of ice.

At every step Mike Dempsey's tired feet broke through this coating, and sank deep into soft stuff beneath, making the traveling so terribly hard that, in spite of the bitter cold, perspiration stood in beads on his thin, brown face.

He was breathing hard, and evidently desperately weary, yet he never stopped for a moment, though now and then, as he plowed his way onwards, he would turn his head and cast an apprehensive glance back over his shoulder.

Had anyone been near enough to watch him, they would easily have understood his haste. The drab livery plentifully besprinkled with broad arrows marked him as one of the state's unwilling guests. As a matter of fact, Mike Dempsey had been for the last three years a prison inmate, and it was with the intention of escaping another seven years of unappreciated hospitality that he had, a few hours previously, "done a bunk" under cover of the sudden snowstorm.

"I've puzzled them screws, that's wan thing sure," he muttered to himself, and in spite of his fatigue a slight chuckle escaped his thin lips. "But faith, I've puzzled meself, too, and I don't know where I am no more than Adam."

"If I cud only git a landmark of some sort!" he went on. "Enst I cud find my road to the railway, I'd win clear. Mike Dempsey wasn't a navy seven years for nothing."

He crunched his slow way across a flat valley, jumped a little brook and pushed up the steep slope beyond.

A gleam of light in the next valley attracted his attention. It came from a lighted window, and there was something comforting to the lonely fugitive in the red glow cast upon the glittering snow. Without hesitation, he started downhill toward it.

Presently he was cautiously approaching a small house, which stood in a tiny garden surrounded by a low dry-stone wall. There was a gate in front, but Mike preferred to approach

the angle of the house curly-locks came flying after him.

"William, where is Santy Claus?" piped the childish treble.

"It ain't William, sonny. Tell your mammy as William's got lost, and I brought the things instead. Now I've got to go, for I'm in a mighty hurry."

"I expect you are!" came a jeering voice, and a blue-uniformed man carrying a carbine stepped out from the dark shadow round the corner, followed instantly by a second.

Mike gave one glance around. But he was cornered. The wall cut off escape.

"All right," he said sullenly. "I'll come quiet."

"You'd better," retorted the warder, whose temper long hours in the snow had not improved.

"Mammy, the policemen have took Santy Claus," cried the little lad.

Mike glanced up. The boy's mother was standing by, her face blank with amazement.

"What does this mean?" she cried. "Is it William?"

"Not unless he's changed his name since morning, missus," replied the warder. "He was Michael Dempsey when he bunked from Moorlands just after dinner."

"But I don't understand. He's got William Croker's clothes on, and he's brought the things from Ashampton that William went to fetch."

The other warder—a grizzled, elderly man—shook his head.

"You've got me, missus. I don't know what his little game is no more than you."

"Most like he has murdered William," put in the younger warder sourly.

"He said William was lost, mammy," explained the boy, "so he's brought the things instead. And here they is, all safe."

"Best make a clean breast of it, Dempsey," suggested the elder warder.

"Go and find out yourself," flashed the old convict. "William's down the valley there."

"You take the chap into the house, George," said the older warder. "I'll go down and see."

Half an hour later he returned.

"I've found William," he said briefly. "He's froze to death. Dempsey took his clothes, but he didn't have no hand in killing him."

"Then, in the name of sense, what did he come back here for instead of skimming out?" inquired the younger warder, in blank surprise.

"He came to bring our Kiasmas presents," explained curly-locks. "He told me so."

"Well, of all the everlasting fools," gasped the junior warder.

His senior wheeled on him sharply. "A good thing it there were a few more fools of that kind in Moorlands. Ay—and outside, too!"

He turned to Mike.

"Come along, Dempsey," he said in a more kindly tone. "I'll see as the governor knows now it was we come to take you. And I reckon your playing Santy Claus won't do you no harm in his eyes, any more than it nas in mine!"



It Was a Man Lying Flat on His Face.

from the back, and clambering gingerly over the wall crept up to the window from which the light came.

Raising himself till his head was on a level with the sill, he peered through the uncurtained window into a barely furnished living room, lighted by a great fire of glowing turf.

A couch stood in one corner, on which lay a youngish man whose bandaged head showed him to be the victim of some accident. On a chair beside him sat a sweet-faced woman, and on the bare earthen floor played two children—a curly-haired boy of about seven, and a chubby girl a year or so younger.

But what arrested Mike's attention was a little fir tree, not more than four feet high, which stood in an old bucket, on the table in the middle of the room.

For a moment it puzzled Mike. Then he gave a little gasp.

"Beggor, if it ain't a Christmas tree! Why, 'tis Christmas eve, I do believe, though, faith, I'd lost thrack of the date in the old stone jug on the hill. But where's the presents? 'Tis as bare as me own pocket," he went on wonderingly.

At that moment the boy got up, and going forward to the woman, pulled at her dress to attract her attention.

"Mother, isn't Santa Claus coming? He's awful late. We shan't have no Kiasmas tree if he doesn't come soon."

"It's the snow, dearie," explained the mother. "Such a bad storm that I expect he was late in starting. But now it's cleared up, I daresay he'll be here soon."

Her words were cheery, but Mike caught the anxious glance she gave her husband.

"Go out and see if William's in sight yet, Alice," said the man. "He ought to have been here an hour ago. I only hope nothing has happened to the poor old fellow."

Mike dropped on hands and knees behind the angle of the wall as the door opened, and the woman stood on the threshold looking out down the empty snowclad valley.

Somehow the pathos of the bare little Christmas tree and the anxious family appealed to his hardened old soul, and when the door closed again he rose to his feet, and instead of following out his first intention and entering the house to demand food and clothes, climbed the wall again and made off down the valley.

"If William's coming this way, there'll be a road of sorts," he said to himself.

And sure enough there was. Though covered deep in snow, he found that there was a path down the valley, which he had little doubt would lead eventually to the main road to town.

He had gone another mile when a dark patch in the snow straight ahead attracted his attention, and he caught his breath sharply as he stopped beside it.

For it was a man lying flat on his face, and, judging by the snow which almost covered his body, he had been there in the same position for some time. Beside him lay a half-filled sack, also covered with snow.

Mike gave a sharp glance around. The moonlight horizon was still bare. He stooped and turned the man over.

"Dead!" he muttered. "Dead and cold!" as he laid his hand against the chill cheek.

For a moment he stood staring at the dead man's face, which was that of a little old man, wizened and bearded, and very much of Mike's own type and build.

Then, like a flash, it came to the convict that here at last was his chance, and a thrill shot through his weary frame.

"He'll not need them duds any more," he muttered, and dropping on his knees in the snow, began with trembling fingers to strip the dead man of his clothes.

They were worn and old, but to Mike as precious as broadcloth, for once he was rid of his convict garb he had multiplied his chances of escape a hundredfold.

Not till he had completed the whole change of costume down to boots and hat, and had buried his broad arrows deep in a neighboring drift, did Mike bethink himself of the sack.

He snatched it up eagerly, hoping it might contain food, and turned the contents out upon the snow.

A small drum, a bag of lead soldiers, a cheap doll, a box of wax tapers, and one of crackers, and a couple of packets of sweets. Not an article of the lot which had cost 25 cents, and the value of the whole not five dollars.

Mike stood and stared at them. The box of soldiers had fallen open. He stooped and picked up the little painted figures, and replaced them carefully.

"So 'twas poor old Santy Claus," he muttered. "And the children will be waiting on him. 'Twas hard luck intirely."

Again he bent down and quickly bundled everything back into the sack. He laid this by the dead body, and turning on his heel, walked rapidly away.

He could not be more than four or five miles from the town now, and with his knowledge of railway matters it would be easy enough to stow away in a truck, and lying under a tarpaulin he carried scores of miles away from the hated prison. Besides there was money in his trousers pockets. Only a little, but plenty to buy food and drink, a clay pipe, and a plug of tobacco.

Mike's mouth watered as he thought of a square meal.

He tried to keep his thoughts on the prospect of these almost forgotten luxuries, yet, somehow it was difficult. The picture seen through the cottage window kept rising before his mind, and though he did his best to thrust it aside, the effort was unavailing.

Long years ago Mike had a home of his own, a wife, and a baby. Wife and baby both had died, swept away in a weea by an epidemic of diphtheria, and that had been the beginning of the Irish navy's downfall. But he had never forgotten them, and tonight they seemed strangely near him.

A sound between a grunt and a groan burst from his lips; he stopped and looked back.

"'Tis a fool ye are, Mike Dempsey!" he exclaimed aloud. "Git along wid ye, and don't be delaying for the screws to nab ye!"

Again he started forward, but more slowly than before, and he had not gone a hundred yards before once more he came to a dead stop.

"This no use," he groaned. "I'll just run back an' lave thim things at the dure. There'll be time to reach town by midnight."

The bitter wind was in his face as he turned back up the hill, but now Mike did not hesitate for a moment. Head down, he hurried onwards, and presently was again beside the corpse of Santa Claus' frozen messenger. Without a glance at the body he snatched up the sack, flung it over his shoulder, and continued his way up the valley.

The glow from the lighted window threw its red beam across the snow as he rounded the curve and came within sight of the lonely cottage and a corresponding glow warmed Mike's heart as he thought of the pleasure of the children when they found their long-delayed Christmas gifts.

Seeing no sign of life, he slipped in at the front gate, and, stepping very quietly up the path, gained the door, dropped his sack, and giving one sharp tap, turned the bolt.

But he had not counted on the eager children, and before he could get round



"All Right," He Said Sullenly, "I'll Come Quiet."

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A Lot of Eager Dames Were Pawing Over Some Chinchilla Ribbon.

human being, working for a living, and every time I see a hundred dollar bill I get red in the face and want a drink of water. You know, Hep, my father didn't spend his life wrapping it up in bundles and throwing it into an iron woodshed against the time it became old enough to use it as a torch!"

"Say!" chirped Hep, who hadn't paid the slightest attention to what I was saying, "why don't you get her an emerald necklace? Some idea—what? I saw one the other day for \$3,000. Wait a minute! I'll give you a card to the manager."

"Give it to the chauffeur," I said as I pushed Hep into the taxi. "By the time he gets you home you'll owe him enough to buy emeralds."

Then I left him flat and moseyed off for a department store to get a Christmas present for friend wife.

Say! did you ever get tangled up in